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TOILET ARTICLES
FROM ANCIENT EGYPT

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Ivory Ointment Spoon representing a Formal Bouquet of Pomegranate Fruit and Flowers and Lotus Buds, in red, tan and black. Late Eighteenth Dynasty (about 1350 B.C.) *Length: 20.8 cm.*

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Toilet Articles
from
Ancient Egypt.

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TOILET ARTICLES
FROM ANCIENT EGYPT

VANITY is older than the pyramids. Long before history the Ancient Egyptians painted their eyes and bodies and anointed themselves with oils and unguents. Prehistoric graves (before 3000 B.C.) have yielded little bags of powdered malachite, once employed as a green eye-shadow, bags of galena, a dark-gray ore of lead, which served as *kohl* for darkening lids and brows, and other bags containing red ochre, perhaps used to paint the face or body. Such bags were placed within easy reach of the dead, and with them are sometimes found palettes of slate, often beautifully fashioned, on which the colors were ground (PL. I-II). Some of the palettes show hollows made by use and ancient stains of green, gray-black, or red pigment. Gradually, these palettes seem to have acquired a ritual, as well as a practical, use. In the later prehistoric and early historical period they are sometimes covered with beautifully executed relief sculpture. In addition to the palettes, prehistoric graves usually contain little jars of stone or pottery which, like similar jars in later periods, may once have held oils and unguents for cleansing and softening the skin (PL. III-A).

Throughout the history of Ancient Egypt, paints and cosmetics played an important part in Egyptian life and were among the essential equipment for the long journey to the land beyond the tomb, where the Egyptians, a pleasure- and

luxury-loving people, hoped still to enjoy the good things of this world. During life, the great of the land, whose pleasures are reflected on the walls of their tombs, spent long hours in feasting and entertainment. For such occasions, they were robed in fine linen and decked in jewelry. Their eyes and eyebrows, sometimes perhaps their cheeks and lips, were carefully painted (Fig. 5); their finger-tips and toes were stained red with henna; they wore their own hair, elaborately dressed, or, more often, large curled and braided wigs, the ringlets and plaits of which were set with the aid of a lotion. Long ago, as now, ladies carried with them to parties mirrors and make-up boxes, which on tomb-walls are occasionally depicted under the chairs of their owners (Fig. 1). Beginning with the Eighteenth Dynasty (about 1580 B.C.), tomb-paintings frequently show banqueters with what appear to be cones of scented unguents on their heads; as the feast progressed, the unguents apparently melted and ran down to perfume and refresh the head and body (Fig. 2).

Cosmetics, however, were more than a mere luxury in Egypt. In the hot, dry climate of the Nile Valley, oils and unguents were necessary to keep the skin from drying and cracking and breaking into sores. They were used, moreover, in place of soap, for cleansing the body. Even the humblest anointed their bodies with cheaper oils, such as that of the castor bean, and those who could get them used rarer, more costly oils, some of them imported, which were scented with sweet-smelling myrrh or frankincense, brought from lands far to the south, with aromatic resins, or with the petals of flowers. Eye-paint, in addition to giving an illusion of size and lustre to the eyes, helped soften the glare of the intense

Egyptian sun and served as a preventive, actual or magical, against the eye-diseases that were so prevalent in the ancient, as in the modern, East. Old papyri contain numerous recipes for ointments, depilatories, hair-tonics, and eye-washes, and Egyptian cosmetics were still famous among the Greeks and Romans. Unfortunately, many ingredients of the ancient recipes cannot be identified. Moreover, some formulas depend on magic rather than healing drugs: the blood of a *black* bull, for instance, is recommended to keep hair from turning gray; it was thought to be effective merely because it was black.

So highly were cosmetics valued that they had a place in the ritual of the gods and of the dead. Daily, the King, or his proxy, filled the temple of the god with the fresh, clean scent of incense, washed the divine image with pure water, clothed it in fine linen, applied to it the precious eye-paint, black and



FIG. 1. GUESTS AT A FEAST
(After a relief in the Leyden Museum)



FIG. 2. LADY AND SERVANT
WITH OINTMENT CONES¹

green, and anointed it with sweet-smelling ointments. Seven kinds of unguents and two of eye-paint were required for the use of the dead in the future life. Coffins of the Middle Kingdom (c. 2100 B.C.), which bear graphic representations of the offerings prescribed for those departing this world, depict an elaborate series of ointment jars, leather pouches for eye-paint, razors, mirrors, and other accessories of the

toilet. Such pictured objects served as magical substitutes for things considered essential to well-being in the world to come, where the daily program laid out for the dead allotted certain hours for the ritual performance of an elaborate toilet such as had been characteristic of his life on earth.

It is small wonder, in view of the importance given to the care of the body, that toilet articles should show all the skill of the Egyptian craftsmen. Precious materials were sought for them. Some were wrought in ivory, brought from the upper reaches of the Nile or from far-off Mesopotamia, some were banded in gold or inlaid with semiprecious stones or colored pastes. Jars made to contain costly oils and unguents were beautiful in shape, wrought in fine, hard stone, often alabaster or serpentine polished to a velvety lustre (PL. III-V). Some bore the names of their owners (PL. III-B). Once

¹ After Davies and Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Paintings*.

glass-making had been developed, tiny jars, probably for holding the finest, scented oils, were made of varicolored glass (PL. VII-B). Especially from the time of the New Kingdom, toilet articles often took on elaborate forms. At a very early period, long-handled spoons, usually of ivory and sometimes with decorative carving, had been used for ointments. In the New Kingdom, such spoons became delicate, shallow bowls mounted on elaborate handles. An ivory spoon of the late Eighteenth Dynasty (about 1350 B.C.) in the Brooklyn Museum represents a formal bouquet composed of a branch of the pomegranate tree and lotus buds (Frontis.). The fruit of the pomegranate, forming the bowl, is divided in half, and the upper half, which serves as a cover for the ointment held in the spoon, turns on a swivel-pin. The spoon is so delicately wrought that one suspects it was never used in life but was made only for the gentle touch of the dead.

The flower-loving Egyptians often used the lotus for the decoration of toilet articles. A second spoon in the Brooklyn Museum represents a formal bouquet of lotus flowers in delicate wood-carving, inlaid with ivory and colored pastes (PL. XVI). A number of ointment spoons have handles simulating swimmers, who carry the containers on their outstretched arms (PL. XIV-XV). A particularly fine one, in wood, represents a negro girl with tucked-up hair and graceful body. Boxes often took the forms of geese and fish (PL. VI, XI, XIII). In fact most of the pleasures of the Egyptians—fishing, hunting, swimming, and feasting—are reflected in the ornament of these charming articles of daily use. A carved cylindrical box (PL. XI) shows Ipy, a functionary of the Theban necropolis, being entertained at a feast by dancers and musicians.



FIG. 3. LADY APPLYING OINTMENT

(After a relief in the British Museum)

religious or symbolic subjects are comparatively rare in the decoration of toilet articles. A few bear representations of popular gods, particularly Taueret, the grotesque hippopotamus-goddess who protected women in travail, and the jolly god Bes, a household deity who, with Taueret, watched over childbirth, and acted as guardian of the bedchamber and patron of the toilet (PL. IX, XII).

Pots and tubes for *kohl*, or eye-paint, like containers for ointment, were sometimes costly and elaborate. Many, it is true, were very simple, nothing more than a section of reed, provided with a plug or stopper. One such, in the Brooklyn Museum, with an applicator or "pencil" attached to its stopper, is still stained with green eye-paint. Sometimes wood or faience took the place of the reed. A blue faience tube once belonged to the great king Amenophis III and bears, inlaid in paler blue, his name and that of his wife, Tiy, the mother of

The inscription gives a snatch of the harper's song:

"Deck thyself with garlands, anoint thyself with oil, spend the day merrily! Health to the most excellent, the virtuous, the god-rewarded servant Ipy!"

On the whole,

Ikhnaton (PL. VIII). A wooden box for *kohl* in the Museum collection is, while undecorated, of special interest, for it contains three compartments for three different eye-paints and an inscription which indicates that the first, for the season when the Nile overflows its banks, is to open the sight, the second, for the season when the fields appear from the flood-waters, to expel all evil from the eyes, and the third, for the harvest season, to make the eyes cease to water. A group of four faience tubes adds a compartment for eye-paint "for every-day use."

Little jars of fine stone or faience or glazed steatite, the latter often richly ornamented, were frequently used for *kohl* instead of tubes. A fine blue-glazed steatite jar in the Brooklyn Museum has an openwork decoration of sacred hawks



FIG. 4. THE PRINCESS KAUYT AT HER TOILET
(After her sarcophagus in Cairo)



FIG. 5. GENT, ROUGHING HER LIPS
(After a papyrus in the Turin Museum)

and cobras, combined with hieroglyphs used as protective symbols (PL. IX). A less elegant jar of limestone has an incised decoration consisting of a hawk, a winged cobra, and the grotesque, but helpful Taueret (PL. XII). A third jar, glazed in buff, shows

sphinxes holding cartouches bearing royal names (PL. IX).

Among the most charming of Ancient Egyptian toilet articles are the bronze mirrors (PL. XVII-XIX). These are of various forms, rarely round, sometimes leaf-shaped, but most frequently a flattened disk. They are set in handles of bronze, wood, ivory, or faience. There is evidence that the Egyptians possessed costly mirrors of gold, silver, and electrum. As might be expected, no gold or electrum mirrors and but few silver mirrors have survived: the robbers who ransacked most tombs, often before the funeral flowers were faded, carried them off and melted them down long centuries ago. Many bronze mirrors, however, are made of a silver alloy, and some show traces of gold- or silver-plating. Others depended on the high polish of the bronze for a surface that would reflect the features of the owner.

The Egyptians seem to have regarded the polished disks

of their mirrors as a symbol of the sun; for the mirrors, however feebly, gave forth rays of light as did the great life-giver of the universe. The handles, too, are often symbolic. The most usual is in the form of the papyrus stalk, which symbolized youthful vigor. Rarely, the stalk is decorated in a relief design of scrolls or twists and plaits. Sometimes the papyrus capital is supplanted by the head of the cow-headed Hathor, goddess of love and festivity. Occasionally a figure of the god Bes serves as a mirror handle, and with the Eighteenth Dynasty come charming handles in the form of nude serving-maids, who hold the disks for the use of their owners (PL. XIX).

The Egyptians feared baldness. Their ancient medical papyri contain many formulas for lotions and salves to prevent hair from falling out. Yet, as a rule, they cut their hair very short and even sometimes shaved their heads for the sake of coolness and cleanliness. For public appearances, however, men and women of the upper classes wore elaborately curled wigs, which needed the attention of a hairdresser to be kept in order (Fig. 4). Though kings wore artificial beards held on by a strap as a sign of dignity and rank, men were usually clean-shaven, and both men and women kept their bodies free from superfluous hair. Included among the toilet articles found in tombs are, accordingly, numerous bronze razors of different types. Tweezers for plucking out hairs are frequent, as are combs, hairpins, and small bronze objects, often charmingly decorated, which some Egyptologists believe to be hair-curlers, and which are not unlike the metal hair-curlers in use today (PL. IX).

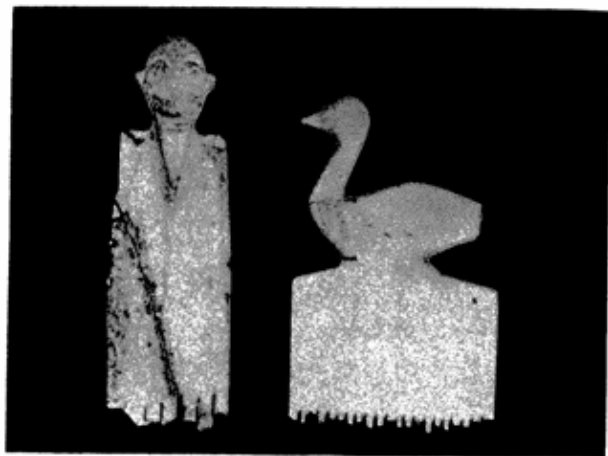
ELIZABETH RIEFSTAHL

NOTE: *The illustrations of objects from the Collection of the New York Historical Society in the Brooklyn Museum are designated by an asterisk (*).*



1. Predynastic slate palettes for grinding colors used in eye-paint and rouge. The small square palette still bears traces of malachite. Before 3000 B.C. *Greatest length*: 66.2 cm.

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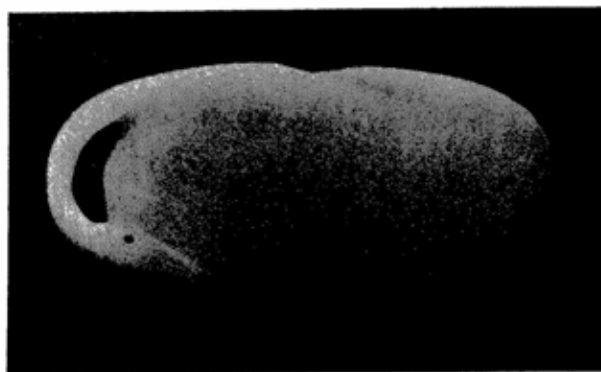


2. Above: Fish-palette and palette-shaped amulets representing turtle and boat. Before 3000 B.C. *Length of fish: 17 cm.*
 Below: Predynastic ivory combs once used as hair-ornaments. Before 3000 B.C. *Greatest height: 7 cm.*



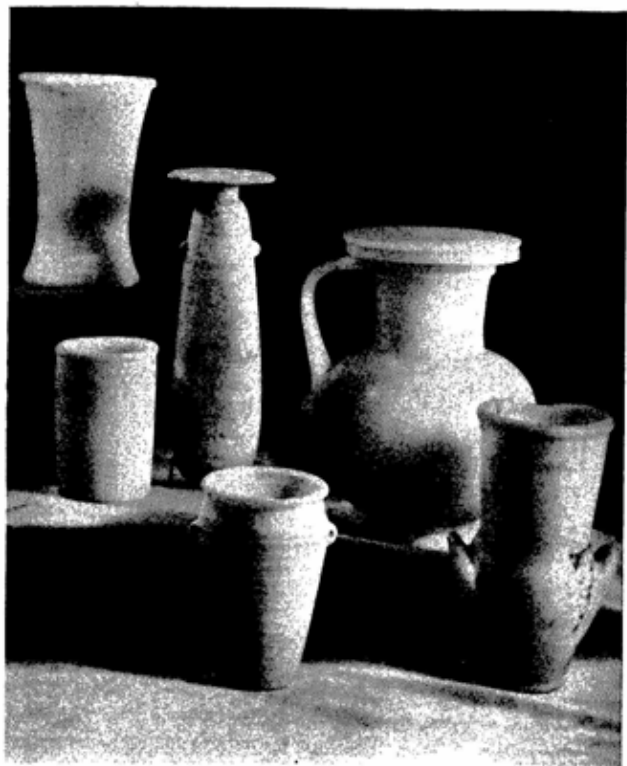
3. Above: Small stone ointment jars, made without the use of metal tools. Predynastic and Early Dynastic (Before 2890 B.C.) Greatest height: 7.8 cm.

Below: *Alabaster ointment jars with the names of Old-Kingdom rulers. About 2650-2475 B.C. Greatest height: 14.7 cm.



4. Above: Alabaster and serpentine jars, hematite kohl-pot and applicator tipped with gold and turquoise. Middle Kingdom (2160-1788 B.C.) Greatest height: 7.5 cm.

Below: Goose-shaped alabaster toilet tray (seen from below). New Kingdom (1580-1150 B.C.) Length: 15.1 cm.



5. Large alabaster ointment jars. *Left to right:* Middle Kingdom, Predynastic, Saïte or later, Early Dynastic, and two New-Kingdom forms. (3000 B.C.-500 B.C.) *Greatest height:* 23.2 cm.



6. Above: *Slate toilet box representing a fish with inlaid eyes. New Kingdom (1580-1150 B.C.) Length: 8.8 cm.

Below: Slate toilet tray representing a captured ibex (seen from below). New Kingdom (1580-1150 B.C.) Length: 17.4 cm.



7. Above: *Wooden toilet box in the form of a couching gazelle. New Kingdom (1580-1150 B.C.) Length: 19.5 cm.

Below: *Jars of colored glass, probably used for precious oils. New Kingdom (1580-1150 B.C.) Greatest height: 8.6 cm.



8. *Left: *Blue faience kohl-tube with names of Amenophis III and Queen Tiye. New Kingdom (1580-1150 B.C.) Height: 13.5 cm.*

*Right: *Miniature serpentine pot in form of frog (seen from side and bottom). Early Dynastic (c. 3000 B.C.) Length: 4 cm.*



9. Above: *Box and tray, Bes-shaped kohl-pot, comb, hairpins, mirror, curler. New Kingdom (1580-1150 B.C.) Length of box: 16.2 cm.

Below: Glazed stone kohl-pots. Left: With names of rulers. *Right: With openwork carving. New Kingdom (1580-1150 B.C.) Height: 5.2 and 4.9 cm.



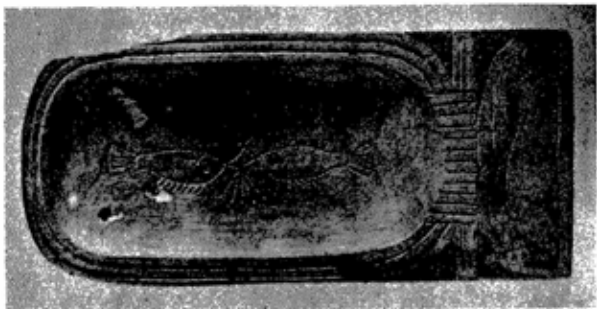
10. Above: *Ivory ointment dish with wooden lid carved to represent a lotus. New Kingdom (1580-1150 B.C.) Length: 7.8 cm.

Below: *Ivory toilet tray in the form of a trussed animal. New Kingdom (1580-1150 B.C.) Length: 13.4 cm.

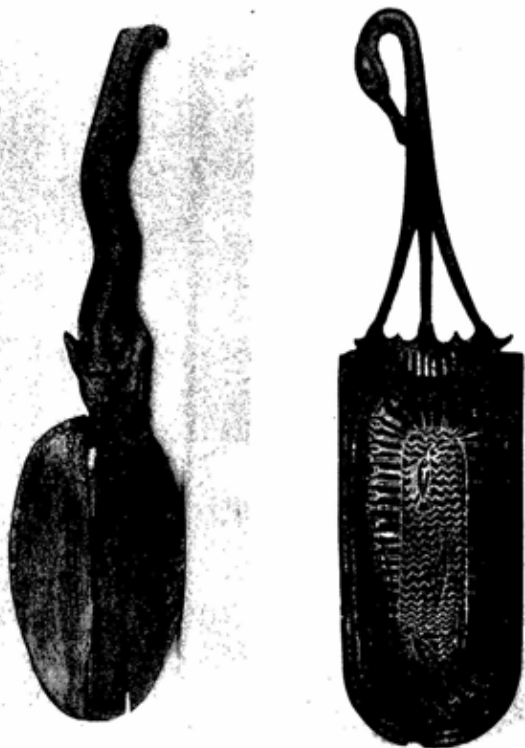


11. Above: *Wooden toilet box with swivel-top and inlay of blue paste. New Kingdom (1580-1150 B.C.) Length: 16 cm.

Below: *Wooden toilet box of the official, Ipy, with scenes of festivity. Nineteenth-Twentieth Dynasty (1350-1090 B.C.) Height: 11.2 cm.



12. Above: *Wooden tray in form of cartouche with fish-pond. Blue inlay. New Kingdom (1580-1150 B.C.) Length: 11.8 cm.
Below: Wooden spoon with head of God Bes, kohl-jar with Goddess Taueret. Roman Period and New Kingdom (1580-1150 B.C.) Length of spoon: 10.5; height of jar: 6 cm.



13. *Wooden ointment spoons. *Left:* With dog- or jackal-handle. *Right:* With fish-pond surrounded by lotus and with goose-neck handle. New Kingdom (1580-1150 B.C.) *Length:* 26 and 23.3 cm.



14. *Wooden untinned spoon in the form of a swimming negro girl with tucked-up hair. The bowl of the spoon represented an aquatic bird. New Kingdom (1580-1150 B.C.) Length: 26.5 cm.



15. Above: *Wooden handle for ointment box or spoon in the form of a captive.
 Below: *Ivory toilet spoon or tray carried by a swimming girl. New Kingdom
 (1580-1150 B.C.) Length: 16.7 and 13.7 cm.



16. *Wooden ointment spoon representing a formal bouquet of lotus and daisy-like flowers. Swivel-cover. Inlay of ivory and blue paste. New Kingdom (1580-1150 B.C.) Length: 29.5 cm.



17. *Bronze mirror with papyrus umbril and handle ornamented in relief. Traces of gilding on disk. Middle Kingdom (2160-1788 B.C.) Length: 20.3 cm.



18. *Bronze mirror with head of Hathor, goddess of love and festivity. New Kingdom (1580-1150 B.C.) Length: 27.8 cm.

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